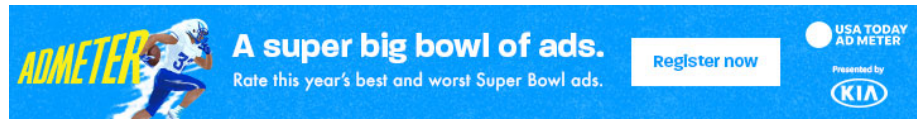


Exhibit 17



Clerks prepare to handle spike in absentee voters in March presidential primary election

Jackie Smith, Port Huron Times Herald Published 12:29 p.m. ET Dec. 10, 2019 | Updated 5:02 p.m. ET Dec. 10, 2019

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Port Huron residents cast their votes Tuesday, Aug. 7, 2018, in the August primary elections at Colonial Woods Missionary Church in Port Huron. (Photo: Brian M. Wells/Times Herald)

A surge in pre-Election Day voter activities is widely expected by Michigan's presidential primary in March since a 2018 ballot measure expanded absentee access, but local clerks said they're prepared to handle it.

Under Proposal 3, voters don't need a reason to request an absentee ballot. [New voters can also still register through the day of an election \(/story/news/2019/10/28/not-everyone-has-election-nov-5-but-those-who-do-have-lot-options-cast-ballot/4086256002/\)](#). Now, some state-level officials and others are asking to be able to better prepare absentee ballots to lighten the workload.

In St. Clair County, it's about how they'll count the votes.

"We haven't seen that much of an uptick. We have been getting some postcards back and we have been calling to (and) from individuals to be placed on that list," Port Huron City Clerk Cyndee Jonseck said of the city's list of absentee voters who have ballots mailed to them. Like many communities, the city didn't have a local November election but is already bracing for March.

"I'm a little bit prepared with that new change," she said. "We purchased an additional AV's tabulator."

Getting prepared: 'It's going to be labor-intensive'

Jonseck said that the new machine cost about \$5,400.

She said the city gets on average 2,400 absentee ballots before a presidential election, and 1,500 for a governor's election. Most of those voters qualified because they were aged 60 and older, Jonseck said.

"Now, that you don't have to check that reason, I believe we'll be much higher," she said, estimating 3,000 or 4,000 absentee ballots will be cast in March.

St. Clair County Clerk Jay DeBoyer had similar expectations for a growth in the number of absentee voters. The expanded absentee rules, he said, were both a good and bad thing.

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"Good (for) people to have better opportunity (to vote)," he said. "The management side from the clerk's perspective, you're going to have this swell of absentee ballots that you're employees have to process on Election Day. It's going to be labor-intensive."

For most of the county's clerks, it's a matter of increasing training.

DeBoyer said that could mean dry-runs, like figuring out how many minutes it will take to count 100 ballots, in order to get a "pretty good grasp on being able to handle it on elections without too many hiccups."

He said he also expects to see "a few more people in the absent voter counting boards as the volume increases."

DeBoyer said while it will add a new challenge, it will also likely ease congestion at polling locations.



In this Aug. 16, 2019, file photo, a man feeds a ballot card into a digital voting machine during a demonstration in Raleigh, N.C. (Photo: Allen G. Breed, AP)

Jonseck agreed there was a "little bit of a difference in training" election workers.

However, she said they also have to prepare to handle voters who are registering the same day as an election. They're training on new electronic poll books where voters swipe their IDs, she said.

"Making changes to voter records, now that's in real-time where everyone in the state can see that," Jonseck said. "On Election Day ... I need to know if someone went and registered in Fort Gratiot."

High numbers in Fort Gratiot

Fort Gratiot is among the locations that did have an election last month, and the township may already be seeing more absentees.

As of Nov. 25, Clerk Robert Buechler said they had 2,660 voters on the township's permanent absent voter list out of close to 9,000 registered voters.

"Fort Gratiot is very active in attempting to grow this list by sending out postcards to voters explaining that they are able to sign up to be on the permanent AV list for any reason," he said in an email. "We will be sending out one more postcard to all voters that are not on the list in the coming months. During presidential election years, the major parties and special interest groups also do voter registration drives throughout the year, so I expect the number of absentee voters to grow."

For last month's election, when Fort Gratiot had a police tax proposal, there were 1,813 absentee ballots issued and 1,530 returned. Compared to 2018's gubernatorial election, when most clerks say they'd expect to see more voters than in an odd-numbered year, 1,894 of the 1,961 ballots issued were returned.

"As you can see, our AV numbers are up to almost the same level as the 2018 general mid-term election and are almost three times higher than the last special election in 2016," Buechler said. The 2016 numbers referenced the 654 AV ballots returned of 715 issued that May.

Also, Buechler said nearly 76 percent of last month's voters were absent, which was a proportion "at least double the percentage that we have seen in the past elections."

Moving forward, the township clerk said they're preparing for both the AV increase and expected increased turnout next year.

"The first thing I am going to do is form an absentee voting counting board, which is a separate group of election inspectors that will only count absentee ballots," Buechler said. "Normally, the AV ballots are processed at the voting precincts, but with the increase in AV ballots, as well as increased voter turnout, an AV counting board will be more efficient. I am also exploring the option of consolidating two of the precincts, in order to free up a tabulator machine."

He said Fort Gratiot is looking into leasing or purchasing another tabulator in 2020 and hiring more inspectors.

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